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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 002593

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TAGS: [EFIN](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KPAL](#) [IS](#) [PTER](#) [FR](#)

SUBJECT: FRENCH CONDEMN TEL AVIV SUICIDE ATTACK, WITHOUT
CONDEMNING HAMAS OR RULING OUT TECHNICAL CONTACTS

REF: STATE 40595

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt, reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: MFA officials offered a disappointing response to reftel points seeking GoF condemnation of the Hamas justification of the April 17 Tel Aviv suicide attack, stressing that the GoF had chosen to "regret" Hamas' reaction rather than condemn Hamas, whom they did not hold responsible for the attack. MFA officials also took issue with the U.S. position urging no contact with sub-ministerial PA officials, and insisted that the recent GAERC contact ban applied to PA ministers only. On the reported Hamas internet financing appeal concerning an Egypt-based subsidiary of Societe Generale, MFA and Finance Ministry contacts pledged to seek further information and get back to us. MFA contacts also confirmed that a Hamas minister has been invited by the Franco-Arab Chamber of Commerce to attend a late April conference in Paris taking place under GOF auspices, for which the MFA NEA bureau has recommended against visa issuance. End summary.

¶2. (C) We reviewed reftel points on the Hamas reaction to the recent Tel Aviv suicide bombing with senior MFA and Finance Ministry officials April 19. MFA DAS-equivalent for Egypt/Levant Herve Besancenot concurred on the reprehensibility of the April 17 Tel Aviv suicide bombing, while refusing to condemn Hamas' and PA statements justifying the attack. Besancenot referred to an MFA statement of April 18, in which the spokesman firmly condemned the attack and expressed "regret" that the Palestinian government had not done so as well. Poloff countered that the Hamas reaction was not a simple failure to condemn, but constituted an endorsement of a suicide bombing which killed two French citizens. Besancenot countered that the GoF had denounced the actual perpetrators of the attack, in this case Islamic Jihad, but, unlike the U.S., would not extend this condemnation to Hamas, which was not responsible. He conceded, though, that Hamas' response to the attack was certainly "unjustified."

¶3. (C) Further on reftel points, Besancenot also took issue with the U.S. position urging no diplomatic contact with sub-ministerial level PA officials. He asserted that the GoF continued to see a distinction between the Hamas-led "Palestinian government", which we should continue to pressure, and the PA, led by President Abbas, who needed continued support. Referring to the April 10 EU GAERC,

Besancenot affirmed that EU members had agreed to suspend all contact with PA ministers, while insisting however that no such decision had been taken with respect to working level PA officials. In the GoF view, certain "technical contacts" with sub-ministerial PA officials would be permissible, if necessary for facilitating assistance, for instance, without constituting political contact. Besancenot added that the U.S. request to refrain from contacting "those who report to" PA ministers was too open-ended for the GoF. Poloff countered that such contact, in light of Hamas and PA justification of suicide attacks and continued Hamas refusal to accept the Quartet conditions, would be an egregious mistake and undermine efforts to pressure Hamas. Besancenot responded that the GoF remained firm in its insistence on Hamas compliance with the Quartet conditions, but unlike the U.S., was not seeking the fall of the Hamas government, which could lead to a new election and an even bigger Hamas majority.

¶4. (C) On the reported Hamas appeal for supporters to deposit money into an Egyptian bank which is a subsidiary of Societe Generale (reftel), Besancenot said he would seek further information from the French embassy in Cairo and get back to us. In a separate discussion with Econ Counselor, Finance Ministry Office Director for European Affairs Karine Segura said she was unaware of any such Societe Generale-Hamas connection, and would be talking with her MFA counterparts before taking any further steps.

¶5. (C) On a separate issue, Besancenot noted that the PA Minister of Planning, a Hamas member, had been invited by the Franco-Arab Chamber of Commerce to attend an April 26-27 conference in Paris at which FM Douste-Blazy will be a

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speaker. Besancenot confirmed that his bureau had recommended against issuing the visa, due to Douste-Blazy's presence and the fact that the conference will be under GoF patronage -- which would cross the red-line on political contact set by the EU. He added that the GoF had contacted the office of PA President Abbas to seek an alternate, lower-level PA participant, but Abbas' office declined to get involved in the issue. Besancenot concluded that the EU had no common policy in place with respect to visa issuance for sub-ministerial Hamas members, and that the EU terrorism designation of Hamas did not preclude visa issuance to individual Hamas members seeking personal travel to EU countries. Pressed by poloff, Besancenot conceded that the GoF was under no obligation to issue visas to Hamas members, but he stressed that it was not forbidden from doing so either. Pressed on reports that a Hamas delegation planning to visit Norway in May may visit France and already possess a French Schengen visa, Besancenot said he was aware of the reported Norway visit but did not have any information to indicate that the Hamas delegation was seeking to visit France, nor that it had obtained a French visa.

¶6. (C) Comment: The MFA reaction to the this demarche is a troubling sign of a weaker French line on Hamas contact, though we note that Besancenot is a classic MFA Arabist often quite critical of U.S. policy towards Israel and the Palestinians. With Besancenot's MFA and Elysee superiors now accompanying Chirac to Egypt through April 20, we will seek to follow up with them upon their return to Paris to press the GoF not to waver on contacts with, or visa issuance to, Hamas members. End comment.
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